

THE DECREES OF THE VATICAN COUNCIL

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EDITED BY
FATHER McNABB, O.P.

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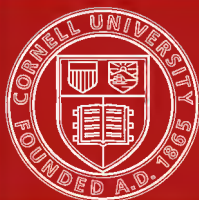
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THE DECREES
OF THE
VATICAN COUNCIL

Edited
WITH AN INTRODUCTION
by the
REV. VINCENT McNABB, O.P.

LONDON
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To the Reader

IN presenting to the English reading public "The Decrees of the Vatican Council" we make no apology for calling it the "best book" and most valuable religious relic left to the twentieth century by the nineteenth. It is somewhat surprising that collections of the "hundred best books," which usually begin with the Bible and generally include Marcus Aurelius, should give no place to the Acts of the General Councils; though mere literary works have done little beyond filling vacant hours, and these Acts have renewed the face of the earth.

Perhaps no General Council has been more naturally fitted than the Vatican Council to produce a masterpiece of religious thought and literature. No assembly of men since the time of CHRIST has ever been so representative of Christian and national thought. It is literally true to say that the Whitsun tongues of fire fell not on so many nations as were gathered together in Rome, July 18, 1870. Hardly one civilized or barbaric nation was unrepresented in the hierarchy. For the first time in the history of the Church every continent of the world sent its representative to bear witness to

the truth. When we contrast the 537 bishops that voted in the last session with the 318 that voted at Nicea for the divinity of the Son of GOD and with the 274 that voted at Ephesus for the humanity of JESUS CHRIST, we begin to see the religious importance of the Vatican Council. We have to remember, moreover, that there were but five Western bishops at Nicea, and probably less at Ephesus, so that (numerically speaking) Nicea and Ephesus were representative merely of the East, and not wholly representative even of that, whereas the Old World and the New were fully represented at the Vatican.

Moreover, though the Acta of Nicea are almost wholly lost, it is not improbable that they, like the Acta of Ephesus, were quite as voluminous as those of the Vatican. Yet Nicea lasted only sixty-eight, Ephesus seventy, the Vatican 222 days.* It is no exaggeration then to say that as compared with the two earlier Councils the Vatican was made up of twice as many bishops, representing ten times as many nations and spending thrice as much time over its decrees. Yet it is to Nicea and Ephesus we owe the two fundamental doctrines of the divinity and humanity of JESUS CHRIST. And men who, rightly, find no difficulty in accepting the two earlier councils, scruple to accept the last.

It would be tiresome so enumerate the amendments to the original draft of the Acta that were proposed and set aside. Eighty-six committee meetings (*Congregationes Generales*) were held. Of these forty-six dealt with the Constitution on Faith, and forty with the

*The figures for Nicea and Ephesus are only approximate.

Constitution on the Church of CHRIST. These committee meetings lasted on an average four hours; and they were attended by the whole body of voters. The private work accompanying this formal activity may be left to the imagination. Yet the net result of this almost endless discussion is a document no larger than a page or two of a daily newspaper.

Catholic students of the *Acta* will not need reminding how great is the difference between the first Constitution and the second; for they are not of those who see in the Vatican Council merely a Roman cabal gathered together for the apotheosis of Ultramontanism. Such an unhistorical view of the Council is not consistent with an unbiased reading of the magnificent definitions which spring from the inter-relations of faith and reason. It is often the fate of great facts as of great truths to be praised or blamed for what is of least moment. In obedience to this law the Vatican Council has been welcomed or rejected for its decisions on the authority of the Holy See, though these decisions are hardly so momentous or fundamental as those on faith and reason.

Another law of history and of heresy is that Conciliar decisions instead of closing discussion often open, or at least precede, it. Arianism was at its height after the Nicene *ὁμολογίς*; the disputes on Grace followed the Council of Trent; Biblical criticism has reached its climax after the Vatican definition on Inspiration and Revelation. To such as find their lot cast amidst the intellectual unsettlement of the twentieth century it is consoling to realize that our

Catholic fathers of the nineteenth century have left us a heritage of truth to which we have only to remain true in order to turn the mobile shifting flank of heresy. And this last will and testament of the past century, brief as a will and pregnant as a dying wish, holds within its formal words the principles whereby the *errores et terrores sæculi*, the falsehoods and fears of our age, may be met and withstood.

VINCENT McNABB, O.P.

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Chronology

1864. Dec. 6. Pius IX first suggests a General Council.
1865. March. Commission of Direction appointed; Letters sent to various Bishops.
1866. Dec. 8. The Bishops are invited to meet in Rome, Dec. 8, 1867.
1867. June 26. Pius IX announces to the Bishops his intention to hold a Council.
1868. June 29. The Bull *Æterni Patris* summoning the Council for Dec. 8, 1869.
1869. Dec. 8. FIRST SESSION.
1870. April 24. THIRD SESSION: DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION ON THE CATHOLIC FAITH.
1870. July 18. FOURTH SESSION: DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH OF CHRIST.

**THE DECREES OF THE VATICAN
COUNCIL**

**Dogmatic Constitution on the
Catholic Faith**

DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION ON THE CATHOLIC FAITH

*Promulgated in the 3rd Session of the Holy
Œcumenical Vatican Council*

PIUS, BISHOP,

*Servant of the servants of God, with the approval of the
Sacred Council, for Perpetual Remembrance*

OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, the Son of GOD, and Redeemer of mankind, before returning to His Heavenly Father, promised that He would be with the Church Militant on earth all days, even to the consummation of the world. Therefore he has never ceased to be present with His beloved Spouse, to assist her when teaching, to bless her when at work, and to aid her when in danger. And this His salutary providence, which has been constantly displayed by other innumerable benefits, has been most manifestly proved by the abundant good results which Christendom has derived from Œcumenical Councils, and particularly from that of Trent, although it was held in evil times. For, as a consequence, the sacred doctrines of the Faith have been defined more closely and set forth more fully; errors have been condemned and restrained; ecclesiastical discipline has been restored and more firmly secured; the love of learning and of piety has been promoted among the clergy; colleges have been established to educate youth for

the sacred warfare; and the morals of the Christian world have been renewed by the more accurate training of the faithful and by the more frequent use of the sacraments. Moreover, there has resulted a closer communion of the members with the visible head and an increase of vigour in the whole mystical body of CHRIST; the multiplication of religious congregations and of other institutions of Christian piety; and such ardour in extending the kingdom of CHRIST throughout the world, as constantly endures, even to the sacrifice of life itself.

But while we recall with due thankfulness these and other signal benefits which the divine mercy has bestowed on the Church, especially by the last Œcumenical Council, we cannot restrain our bitter sorrow for the grave evils which are due principally to the fact that the authority of that sacred Synod has been contemned, or its wise decrees neglected, by many.

No one is ignorant that the heresies proscribed by the Fathers of Trent, by which the divine teaching (*magisterium*) of the Church was rejected, and all matters regarding religion were surrendered to the judgment of each individual, gradually became dissolved into many sects, which disagreed and contended with one another, until at length not a few lost all faith in CHRIST. Even the Holy Scriptures, which had previously been declared the sole source and judge of Christian doctrine, began to be held no longer as divine, but to be ranked among the fictions of mythology.

Then there arose, and too widely overspread the world, that doctrine of rationalism, or naturalism,

which opposes itself in every way to the Christian religion as a supernatural institution, and works with the utmost zeal in order that, after CHRIST, our sole LORD and SAVIOUR, has been excluded from the minds of men, and from the life and moral acts of nations, the reign of what they call pure reason or nature may be established. And after forsaking and rejecting the Christian religion, and denying the true God and His CHRIST, the minds of many have sunk into the abyss of Pantheism, Materialism and Atheism, until, denying rational nature itself, and every sound rule of right, they labour to destroy the deepest foundations of human society.

Unhappily, it has yet further come to pass that, while this impiety prevailed on every side, many, even of the children of the Catholic Church, have strayed from the path of true piety; and by the gradual diminution of the truths they held, the Catholic sense has become weakened in them. For led away by various and strange doctrines, wrongly confusing nature and grace, human science and divine faith, they are found to deprave the true sense of the doctrines which our holy Mother Church holds and teaches, and to endanger the integrity and the soundness of the faith.

Considering these things, how can the Church fail to be deeply stirred? For, even as GOD wills all men to be saved, and to arrive at the knowledge of the truth; even as CHRIST came to save what had perished and to gather together the children of GOD who had been dispersed, so the Church, constituted by GOD the mother and teacher of all nations, knows its own

office as debtor to all, and is ever ready and watchful to raise the fallen, to support those who are falling, to embrace those who return, to confirm the good and to carry them on to better things. Hence it can never forbear from witnessing to and proclaiming the truth of God, which heals all things, knowing the words addressed to it: "My Spirit that is in thee, and My words that I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, from henceforth and for ever."*

We, therefore, following the footsteps of our predecessors, have never ceased, as becomes our supreme apostolic office, from teaching and defending Catholic truth, and condemning doctrines of error. And now, with the Bishops of the whole world assembled round us and judging with us, congregated by our authority and in the Holy Spirit in this Œcumenical Council, We, supported by the Word of God written and handed down, as We have received it from the Catholic Church, preserved with sacredness and set forth according to truth, have determined to profess and declare the salutary teaching of CHRIST from this Chair of Peter, and in sight of all, proscribing and condemning, by the power given to Us by God, all errors contrary thereto.

I

Of God the Creator of all things

THE Holy Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Church believes and confesses that there is one, true and living God, Creator and Lord of heaven and earth,

* Isa. lix, 21.

almighty, eternal, immense, incomprehensible, infinite in intelligence, in will and in all perfection, who, as being one, sole, absolutely simple and immutable spiritual substance, is to be declared as really and essentially distinct from the world, of supreme beatitude in and from Himself, and ineffably exalted above all things beside Himself which exist or are conceivable.

This one, only, true God, of His own goodness and almighty power, not for the increase of His own happiness, nor to acquire but to manifest His perfection by the blessings which He bestows on creatures, with absolute freedom of counsel, created out of nothing, from the beginning of time, both the spiritual and corporeal creature, to wit, the angelic and the mundane; and afterwards the human creature, as partaking, in a sense, of both, consisting of spirit and of body.* God protects and governs by His providence all things which He hath made, "reaching from end to end mightily, and ordering all things sweetly." † For "all things are bare and open to His eyes," ‡ even those which are yet to be by the free action of creatures.

II

Of Revelation

THE same holy Mother Church holds and teaches that God, the beginning and end of all things, may be certainly known by the natural light of human reason by means of created things—"for the invisible

* Fourth Lateran Council, cap. 1, *de Fide Catholica*.

† Wisdom viii, 1. ‡ Heb. iv, 13.

things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made";* but that it pleased His wisdom and bounty to reveal Himself, and the eternal decrees of His will to mankind by another and supernatural way, as the Apostle says: "GOD, having spoken on divers occasions and in many ways in times past to the fathers by the prophets, last of all, in these days, hath spoken to us by His Son."†

It is to be ascribed to this divine revelation that such truths among things divine as of themselves are not beyond human reason can, even in the present condition of mankind, be known by every one with facility, with firm assurance, and with no admixture of error.‡ This, however, is not the reason why revelation is to be called absolutely necessary; but because God, of His infinite goodness, has ordained man to a supernatural end, viz., to be a sharer of divine blessings which utterly exceed the intelligence of the human mind; for "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him."§

Further, this supernatural revelation, according to the universal belief of the Church, declared by the sacred Synod of Trent, is contained in the written books and unwritten traditions which, received by the Apostles from the mouth of CHRIST Himself, or by the Apostles themselves, from the dictation of the Holy Spirit, transmitted, as it were, from hand to

* Romans i, 20.

† Heb. i, 1, 2.

‡ Summa Theol. 2a 2æ, ii, 4.

§ 1 Cor. ii, 9.

hand, have come down even to us.* And these books of the Old and New Testaments are to be received as sacred and canonical in their integrity, with all their parts, as they are enumerated in the decree of the said Council, and are contained in the ancient Latin edition of the Vulgate. These the Church holds to be sacred and canonical; not because, having been carefully composed by mere human industry, they were afterwards approved by her authority; not because they contain revelation, with no admixture of error; but because, having been written by the inspiration of the HOLY GHOST, they have GOD for their author, and have been delivered as such to the Church itself.

And as the things which, in order to curb rebellious spirits, the holy Synod of Trent decreed for the good of souls concerning the interpretation of divine Scripture have been wrongly explained by some, We, renewing the said decree, declare this to be its meaning: that, in matters of faith and morals, appertaining to the building up of Christian doctrine, that is to be held as the true sense of Holy Scripture which our holy Mother Church hath held and holds, to whom it belongs to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures; and, therefore, that it is permitted to no one to interpret the Sacred Scripture contrary to this sense or likewise contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers.

* Council of Trent, sess. iv, *de Can. Script.*

III

Of Faith

MAN being wholly dependent upon GOD, as upon his Creator and LORD, and created reason being absolutely subject to uncreated truth, we are bound to yield to GOD, by faith in His revelation, the full obedience of our intelligence and will. And the Catholic Church teaches that this faith, which is the beginning of man's salvation, is a supernatural virtue, whereby, inspired and assisted by the grace of GOD, we believe that the things which He has revealed are true; not because the intrinsic truth of the things is plainly perceived by the natural light of reason, but because of the authority of GOD Himself, who reveals them, and who can neither be deceived nor deceive. For faith, as the Apostle testifies, is "the substance of things hoped for, the conviction of things that appear not."*

Nevertheless, in order that the obedience of our faith might be in harmony with reason, GOD willed that to the interior help of the Holy Spirit there should be joined exterior proofs of His revelation, to wit, divine facts, and especially miracles and prophecies, which, as they manifestly display the omnipotence and infinite knowledge of GOD, are most certain proofs of His divine revelation adapted to the intelligence of all men. Wherefore, both Moses and the prophets, and most especially CHRIST our LORD Himself, showed

* Hebrews xi, 1.

forth many and most evident miracles and prophecies, and of the Apostles we read: "But they, going forth, preached everywhere, the LORD working withal, and confirming the word with signs that followed."* And again it is written: "We have the more firm prophetic word, whereunto you do well to attend, as to a light shining in a dark place."†

But though the assent of faith is by no means a blind action of the mind, still no man can assent to the Gospel teaching, as is necessary to obtain salvation, without the illumination and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who gives to all men sweetness in assenting to and believing in the truth.‡ Wherefore faith itself, even when it does not work by charity, is in itself a gift of God, and the act of faith is a work appertaining to salvation, by which man yields voluntary obedience to God Himself, by assenting to and co-operating with His grace, which he is able to resist. Further, all those things are to be believed with divine and Catholic faith which are contained in the Word of God, written or handed down, and which the Church, either by a solemn judgement or by her ordinary and universal teaching (*magisterium*), proposes for belief as having been divinely revealed.

And since without faith it is impossible to please God, and to attain to the fellowship of His children, therefore without faith no one has ever attained justi-

* Mark xvi, 20.

† 2 Peter i, 19.

‡ Second Council of Orange, confirmed by Pope Boniface II A.D. 529, against the Semipelagians, can. vii. See Denzinger's *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, p. 50, Würzburg, 1854.

fication; nor will anyone obtain eternal life, unless he shall have persevered in faith unto the end. And that we may be able to satisfy the obligation of embracing the true faith and of constantly persevering in it, God has instituted the Church through his His only-begotten Son, and has bestowed on it manifest marks of that institution, that it may be recognized by all men as the guardian and teacher of the revealed Word; for to the Catholic Church alone belong all those many and admirable tokens which have been divinely established for the evident credibility of the Christian Faith. Nay, more, the Church itself, by reason of its marvellous extension, its eminent holiness and its inexhaustible fruitfulness in every good thing, its Catholic unity and its invincible stability, is a great and perpetual motive of credibility, and an irrefutable witness of its own divine mission.

And thus, like a standard set up unto the nations,* it both invites to itself those who do not yet believe, and assures its children that the faith which they profess rests on the most firm foundation. And its testimony is efficaciously supported by a power from on high. For our most merciful LORD gives His grace to stir up and to aid those who are astray, that they may come to a knowledge of the truth; and to those whom He has brought out of darkness into His own admirable light, He gives His grace to strengthen them to persevere in that light, deserting none who desert not Him. Therefore there is no parity between the condition of those who have adhered to the Catholic truth

* Isaias xi, 12.

by the heavenly gift of faith, and of those who, led by human opinions, follow a false religion; for those who have received the faith under the teaching (*magisterio*) of the Church can never have any just cause for changing or doubting that faith. Therefore give thanks to God the Father, who has made us worthy to be partakers of the lot of the saints in light; let us not neglect so great a salvation, but with our eyes fixed on JESUS, the author and finisher of our faith, let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering.*

IV

Of Faith and Reason

THE Catholic Church with one consent has also ever held, and does hold, that there is a twofold order of knowledge, distinct both in principle and in object: in principle, because our knowledge in the one is by natural reason, and in the other by divine faith; in object, because, besides those things to which natural reason can attain, there are proposed to our belief mysteries hidden in God, which, unless divinely revealed, cannot be known. Wherefore the Apostle, who testifies that God is known by the Gentiles through created things, still, when discoursing of the grace and truth which come by JESUS CHRIST,† says: "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, a wisdom which is hidden, which God ordained before the world unto our glory; which none of the princes of this world knew; . . . but to us God hath revealed them by His

* Hebrews xii, 2; x, 23.

† John i, 17.

Spirit. For the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God."* And the Only-begotten Son Himself gives thanks to the Father, because He has hid these things from the wise and prudent, and has revealed them to little ones.†

Reason, indeed, enlightened by faith, when it seeks earnestly, piously and calmly, attains by a gift from God some, and that a very fruitful, understanding of mysteries; partly from the analogy of those things which it naturally knows, partly from the relations which the mysteries bear to one another and to the last end of man: but reason never becomes capable of apprehending mysteries as it does those truths which constitute its proper object. For the divine mysteries by their own nature so far transcend the created intelligence that, even when delivered by revelation and received by faith, they remain covered with a veil of faith itself, and shrouded in a certain degree of darkness, so long as we are pilgrims in this mortal life, not yet with God: "for we walk by faith, and not by sight."‡

But although faith is above reason, there can never be any real discrepancy between faith and reason; since the same God who reveals mysteries and infuses faith has bestowed the light of reason on the human mind, and God cannot deny Himself, nor can truth ever contradict truth. The false appearance of such a contradiction is mainly due, either to the dogmas of faith not having been understood and expounded according to the mind of the Church, or to the inventions of

* 1 Cor. ii, 7-10. † Matt. xi, 25. ‡ 2 Cor. v, 7.

opinion having been taken for the verdicts of reason. We define, therefore, that every assertion contrary to a truth of enlightened faith is utterly false.* Further, the Church, which, together with the apostolic office of teaching, has received a charge to guard, the deposit of faith, derives from God the right and the duty of proscribing false science, lest any should be deceived by philosophy and vain fallacy.† Therefore all faithful Christians are not only forbidden to defend as legitimate conclusions of science such opinions as are known to be contrary to the doctrines of faith, especially if they have been condemned by the Church, but are altogether bound to account them as errors which put on the fallacious appearance of truth.

And not only can faith and reason never be opposed to one another, but they are of mutual aid one to the other: for right reason demonstrates the foundations of faith, and, enlightened by its light, cultivates the science of things divine; while faith frees and guards reason from errors, and furnishes it with manifold knowledge. So far, therefore, is the Church from opposing the cultivation of human arts and sciences, that it in many ways helps and promotes it. For the Church neither ignores nor despises the benefits to human life which result from the arts and sciences, but confesses that, as they came from God, the Lord of all science, so, if they be rightly used, they lead to God

* From the Bull of Pope Leo X, "Apostolici regiminis," read in Session VIII of the Fifth Lateran Council, A.D. 1513. See Labbe's *Councils*, vol. xix, p. 842. Venice, 1732.

† Col. ii, 8.

by the help of His grace. Nor does the Church forbid that each of these sciences in its sphere should make use of its own principles and its own method; but, while recognizing this just liberty, it stands watchfully on guard, lest sciences, setting themselves against the divine teaching, or transgressing their own limits, should invade and disturb the domain of faith.

For the doctrine of faith which God has revealed has not been proposed, like a philosophical invention, to be perfected by human ingenuity; but has been delivered as a divine deposit to the Spouse of CHRIST, to be faithfully kept and infallibly declared. Hence, also, that meaning of the sacred dogmas is perpetually to be retained which our holy Mother the Church has once declared; nor is that meaning ever to be departed from, under the pretence or pretext of a deeper comprehension of them. Let then the intelligence, science and wisdom of each and all, of individuals and of the whole Church, in all ages and all times, increase and flourish in abundance and vigour; but simply in its own proper kind, that is to say, in one and the same doctrine, one and the same judgement.*

CANONS

I. *Of God the Creator of all things*

1. IF anyone shall deny One true God, Creator and Lord of things visible and invisible, let him be anathema.

2. If anyone shall not be ashamed to affirm that, except matter, nothing exists, let him be anathema.

* Vincent of Lerins, *Common.* n. 28.

3. If anyone shall say that the substance and essence of God and of all things is one and the same, let him be anathema.

4. If anyone shall say that finite things, both corporeal and spiritual, or at least spiritual, have emanated from the divine substance; or that the divine essence by the manifestation and evolution of itself becomes all things; or, lastly, that God is universal or indefinite being, which by determining itself constitutes the universality of things, distinct according to kinds (genera), species and individuals; let him be anathema.

5. If anyone confess not that the world, and all things which are contained in it, both spiritual and material, have been, in their whole substance, produced by God out of nothing; or shall say that God created, not by His will, free from all necessity, but by a necessity equal to the necessity whereby He loves Himself; or shall deny that the world was made for the glory of God; let him be anathema.

II. *Of Revelation*

1. If anyone shall say that the One true God, our Creator and Lord, cannot be certainly known by the natural light of human reason through created things; let him be anathema.

2. If anyone shall say that it is impossible or inexpedient that man should be taught by the divine revelation concerning God and the worship to be paid by him; let him be anathema,

3. If anyone shall say that man cannot be raised by divine power to a higher than natural knowledge and perfection, but can and ought, by a continuous progress, to arrive at length of himself to the possession of all that is true and good; let him be anathema.

4. If anyone shall not receive as sacred and canonical the books of Holy Scripture, entire with all their parts, as the holy Synod of Trent has enumerated them, or shall deny that they have been divinely inspired; let him be anathema.

III. *Of Faith*

1. If anyone shall say that human reason is so independent that faith cannot be enjoined upon it by God; let him be anathema.

2. If anyone shall say that divine faith is not distinguished from natural knowledge of God and of moral truths, and therefore that it is not requisite for divine faith that revealed truth be believed because of the authority of God who reveals it; let him be anathema.

3. If anyone shall say that divine revelation cannot be made credible by outward signs, and therefore that men ought to be moved to faith solely by the internal experience of each, or by private inspiration; let him be anathema.

4. If anyone shall say that miracles are impossible, and therefore that all the accounts regarding them, even those contained in Holy Scripture, are to be dismissed as fabulous or mythical; or that miracles can

never be known with certainty, and that the divine origin of Christianity is not rightly proved by them; let him be anathema.

5. If anyone shall say that the assent of Christian faith is not a free act, but necessarily produced by the arguments of human reason; or that the grace of God is necessary for that living faith only which worketh by charity; let him be anathema.

6. If anyone shall say that the condition of the faithful and of those who have not yet attained to the only true faith is on a par, so that Catholics may have just cause for doubting, with suspended assent, the faith which they have already received under the teaching (*magisterio*) of the Church, until they shall have obtained a scientific demonstration of the credibility and truth of their faith; let him be anathema.

IV. *Of Faith and Reason*

1. If anyone shall say that in divine revelation there are no mysteries, truly and properly so called, but that all the doctrines of faith can be understood and demonstrated from natural principles by properly cultivated reason; let him be anathema.

2. If anyone shall say that human sciences are to be so freely treated, that their assertions, although opposed to revealed doctrine, can be held as true, and cannot be condemned by the Church; let him be anathema.

3. If anyone shall assert it to be possible that sometimes, according to the progress of science, a sense is to be given to doctrines propounded by the Church

different from that which the Church has understood and understands; let him be anathema.

Therefore, fulfilling the duty of Our supreme pastoral office by the mercies of JESUS CHRIST, We entreat, and by the authority of the same Our GOD and SAVIOUR We command, all the faithful of CHRIST, and especially those who are set over others or are charged with the office of instruction, that they earnestly and diligently apply themselves to ward off and eliminate these errors from Holy Church, and to spread the light of pure faith.

And since it is not sufficient to shun heretical pravity, unless those errors also be diligently avoided which more or less nearly approach it, We admonish all men of the further duty of observing the Constitutions and Decrees by which such erroneous opinions as are not here expressly enumerated have been proscribed and condemned by the Holy See.

Given at Rome in public session, solemnly held in the Vatican Basilica in the year of our LORD one thousand eight hundred and seventy, on the twenty-fourth day of April, in the twenty-fourth year of Our Pontificate.

In conformity with the original.

JOSEPH, BISHOP OF ST POLTEN,
Secretary to the Vatican Council.

First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ

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FIRST DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

Promulgated in the 4th Session of the Holy Œcumenical Vatican Council

PIUS, BISHOP,

*Servant of the servants of God, with the approval of the
Sacred Council for Perpetual Remembrance*

THE Eternal Pastor and Bishop of our souls, in order to continue for all time the life-giving work of His Redemption, determined to build up the Holy Church, wherein, as in the house of the living God, all who believe might be united in the bond of one faith and one charity. Wherefore, before He entered into His glory, He prayed unto the Father, not for the Apostles only, but for those also who through their preaching should come to believe in Him, that all might be one, even as He the Son and the Father are one.* As then He sent the Apostles whom He had chosen to Himself from the world, as He Himself had been sent by the Father; so He willed that there should ever be pastors and teachers in His Church to the end of the world. And in order that the Episcopate also might be one and undivided, and that by means of a closely united priesthood the multitude of the faithful might be kept secure in the oneness of faith and communion, He set Blessed Peter over the

* John xvii, 21.

rest of the Apostles, and fixed in him the abiding principle of this twofold unity and its visible foundation, in the strength of which the everlasting temple should arise, and the Church in the firmness of that faith should lift her majestic front to heaven.* And seeing that the gates of hell with daily increase of hatred are gathering their strength on every side to upheave the foundation laid by GOD's own hand, and so, if that might be, to overthrow the Church: We, therefore, for the preservation, safe keeping, and increase of the Catholic flock, with the approval of the Sacred Council, do judge it to be necessary to propose to the belief and acceptance of all the faithful, in accordance with the ancient and constant faith of the universal Church, the doctrine touching the institution, perpetuity and nature of the sacred Apostolic Primacy, in which is found the strength and solidity of the entire Church; and at the same time to proscribe and condemn the contrary errors so hurtful to the flock of CHRIST.

I

*On the Institution of the Apostolic Primacy in
Blessed Peter*

WE therefore teach and declare that, according to the testimony of the Gospel, the primacy of jurisdiction over the universal Church of GOD was immediately and directly promised and given to Blessed Peter the Apostle by CHRIST the LORD. For

* From Sermon iv, chap. ii, of St Leo the Great, A.D. 440, vol. i, p. 17, of edition of Ballerini, Venice, 1753; read in the eighth lection on the feast of St Peter's Chair at Antioch, February 22.

it was to Simon alone, to whom He had already said: "Thou shalt be called Cephas,"* that the LORD, after the confession made by him, saying, "Thou art the CHRIST, the Son of the living God," addressed these solemn words, "Blessed art thou, Simon, Bar-Jona, because flesh and blood have not revealed it to thee, but My Father, who is in heaven. And I say to thee that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven."† And it was upon Simon alone that JESUS after His resurrection bestowed the jurisdiction of Chief Pastor and Ruler over all His fold in the words, "Feed My lambs, feed My sheep."‡ At open variance with this clear doctrine of Holy Scripture, as it has ever been understood by the Catholic Church, are the perverse opinions of those who, while they distort the form of government established by CHRIST the LORD in His Church, deny that Peter in his simple person preferably to all the other Apostles, whether taken separately or together, was endowed by CHRIST with a true and proper primacy of jurisdiction; or of those who assert that the same primacy was not bestowed immediately and directly upon Blessed Peter himself, but upon the Church, and through the Church on Peter as her minister.

* John 1, 42. † Matthew xvi, 16, 19.

‡ John xxi, 15, 17.

If anyone, therefore, shall say that Blessed Peter the Apostle was not appointed the Prince of the Apostles and the visible head of the whole Church militant, or that the same directly and immediately received from the same our LORD JESUS CHRIST a primacy of honour only, and not of true and proper jurisdiction; let him be anathema.

II

*On the Perpetuity of the Primacy of Blessed Peter
in the Roman Pontiffs*

THAT which the Prince of Shepherds and great shepherd of the sheep, JESUS CHRIST our LORD, established in the person of the Blessed Apostle Peter to secure the perpetual welfare and lasting good of the Church, must, by the same institution, necessarily remain unceasingly in the Church, which, being founded upon the Rock, will stand firm to the end of the world. For none can doubt, and it is known to all ages, that the holy and Blessed Peter, the Prince and chief of the Apostles, the pillar of the faith and foundation of the Catholic Church, received the keys of the kingdom from our LORD JESUS CHRIST, the Saviour and Redeemer of mankind, and lives, presides, and judges to this day, always in his successors the Bishops of the Holy See of Rome, which was founded by Him and consecrated by His Blood.*

* From the Acts (session third) of the Third General Council, namely, that of Ephesus, A.D. 431, Labbe's *Councils*, vol. viii, p. 1154, Venice edition of 1728. See also letter of St Peter Chrysologus to Eutyches, in life prefixed to his works, p. 13, Venice, 1750.

Whence, whosoever succeeds to Peter in this See does by the institution of CHRIST Himself obtain the primacy of Peter over the whole Church. The disposition made by Incarnate Truth (*dispositio veritatis*) therefore remains, and Blessed Peter, abiding in the rock's strength which he received (*in accepta fortitudine petræ perseverans*), has not abandoned the direction of the Church.* Wherefore it has at all times been necessary that every particular Church—that is to say, the faithful throughout the world—should come to the Church of Rome on account of the greater principedom it has received ; so that in this See, whence the rights of venerable communion spread to all, they might as members joined together in their head grow closely into one body.† If, then, anyone shall say that it is not by the institution of CHRIST the LORD, or by divine right, that Blessed Peter has a perpetual line of successors in the primacy over the universal Church ; or that the Roman Pontiff is not the successor of Blessed Peter in this primacy ; let him be anathema.

III

On the Power and Nature of the Primacy of the Roman Pontiff

WHEREFORE, resting on plain testimonies of the Sacred Writings, and adhering to the plain and express decrees both of Our predecessors the Ro-

* From Sermon III, chap. iii, of St Leo the Great, vol. I, p. 12.

† From St Irenæus *against Heresies*, book III, cap. iii, p. 175, Benedictine edition, Venice, 1734 ; and Acts of Synod of Aquileia, A.D. 381, Labbe's *Councils*, vol. II, p. 1185, Venice, 1721.

man Pontiffs, and of the General Councils, We renew the definition of the Œcumenical Council of Florence, by which all the faithful of CHRIST must believe that the Holy Apostolic See and the Roman Pontiff possesses the primacy over the whole world; and that the Roman Pontiff is the successor of Blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles, and is true Vicar of CHRIST, and Head of the whole Church, and Father and teacher of all Christians; and that full power was given to him in Blessed Peter, by JESUS CHRIST our LORD, to rule, feed and govern the universal Church: as is also contained in the Acts of the Œcumenical Councils and in the Sacred Canons.

Hence We teach and declare that by the appointment of our LORD the Roman Church possesses a sovereignty of ordinary power over all other Churches, and that this power of jurisdiction of the Roman Pontiff, which is truly episcopal, is immediate; to which all, of whatsoever rite and dignity, both pastors and faithful, both individually and collectively, are bound, by their duty of hierarchical subordination and true obedience, to submit, not only in matters which belong to faith and morals, but also in those that appertain to the discipline and government of the Church throughout the world; so that the Church of CHRIST may be one flock under one supreme Pastor, through the preservation of unity, both of communion and of profession of the same faith, with the Roman Pontiff. This is the teaching of Catholic truth, from which no one can deviate without loss of faith and of salvation.

But so far is this power of the Supreme Pontiff from

being any prejudice to that ordinary and immediate power of episcopal jurisdiction, by which bishops, who have been set by the HOLY GHOST to succeed and hold the place of the Apostles,* feed and govern each his own flock, as true pastors, that this same power is really asserted, strengthened and protected by the supreme and universal Pastor; in accordance with the words of St Gregory the Great, "My honour is the honour of the whole Church. My honour is the firm strength of my brethren. Then am I truly honoured, when the honour due to each and all is not withheld." †

Further, from this supreme power possessed by the Roman Pontiff of governing the universal Church, it follows that, in the exercise of this office, he has the right of free communication with the pastors of the whole Church, and with their flocks, that they may be taught and ruled by him in the way of salvation. Wherefore We condemn and reprobate the opinions of those who hold that the communication between the supreme Head and the pastors and their flocks can lawfully be impeded; or who make this communication subject to the will of the secular power, so as to maintain that whatever is done by the Apostolic See, or by its authority, for the government of the Church, cannot have force or value unless it be confirmed by the assent of the secular power.

* From chap. iv of thirty-third session of Council of Trent, "Of the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy."

† From the *Letters of St Gregory the Great*, book viii, 30, vol. II, p. 919, Benedictine edition, Paris, 1705.

And since, by the divine right of apostolic primacy, one Roman Pontiff is placed over the universal Church, We further teach and declare that he is the supreme judge of the faithful,* and that in all causes the decision of which belongs to the Church recourse may be had to his tribunal,† but that none may reopen the judgment of the Apostolic See, than whose authority there is no greater, nor can any lawfully review its judgment.‡ Wherefore they err from the right path of truth who assert that it is lawful to appeal from the judgments of the Roman Pontiffs to an Œcumenical Council, as to an authority higher than that of the Roman Pontiff.

If then any shall say that the Roman Pontiff has the office merely of inspection or direction, and not full and supreme power of jurisdiction over the universal Church, not only in things which belong to faith and morals, but also in those things which relate to the discipline and government of the Church spread throughout the world; or assert that he possesses merely the principal part, and not all the fullness of this supreme power; or that this power which he enjoys is not ordinary and immediate, both over each and all the Churches and over each and all the pastors of the faithful; let him be anathema.

* From a Brief of Pius VI, *Super soliditate*, of November 28, 1786.

† From the Acts of the Fourteenth General Council (Second of Lyons), A.D. 1274. Labbe's *Councils*, vol. iv, p. 512.

‡ From Letter VIII of Pope Nicholas I, A.D. 858, to the Emperor Michael, in Labbe's *Councils*, vol. ix, pp. 1339 and 1570.

IV

Concerning the Infallible Teaching of the Roman Pontiff

MOREOVER, that the supreme power of teaching (*magisterii*) is also included in the apostolic primacy, which the Roman Pontiff, as the successor of Peter, Prince of the Apostles, possesses over the whole Church, this Holy See has always held, the perpetual practice of the Church confirms, and Œcumenical Councils also have declared, especially those in which the East with the West met in the union of faith and charity. For the Fathers of the Fourth Council of Constantinople, following in the footsteps of their predecessors, gave forth this solemn profession: "The first condition of salvation is to keep the rule of the true faith. And because the sentence of our LORD JESUS CHRIST cannot be passed by, who said, 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church,'* these things which have been said are proved by events, because in the Apostolic See the Catholic religion has always been kept undefiled, and her well-known doctrine has been kept holy. Desiring, therefore, not to be in the least degree separated from the faith and doctrine of this See, we hope that we may deserve to be in the one communion, which the Apostolic See preaches, in

* Matthew xvi, 18.

which is the entire and true solidity of the Christian religion.”*

And, with the approval of the Second Council of Lyons, the Greeks professed that: “the holy Roman Church enjoys supreme and full primacy and principedom over the whole Catholic Church, which it truly and humbly acknowledges that it has received with the plenitude of power from our LORD Himself in the person of Blessed Peter, Prince and Head of the Apostles, whose successor the Roman Pontiff is; and as the Apostolic See is bound before all others to defend the truth of faith, so also, if any questions regarding faith shall arise, they must be defined by its judgement.”†

Finally, the Council of Florence defined that:‡ “the Roman Pontiff is the true Vicar of CHRIST, and the head of the whole Church and the father and teacher of all Christians; and that to him in Blessed Peter was delivered by our LORD JESUS CHRIST the full power of feeding, ruling and governing the whole Church.”§

To satisfy this pastoral duty, our predecessors ever made unwearied efforts that the salutary doctrine of CHRIST might be propagated among all the nations of the earth, and with equal care watched that it might

* From the Formula of St Hormisdas, subscribed by the Fathers of the Eighth General Council (Fourth of Constantinople), A.D. 869. Labbe's Councils, vol. v, pp. 583, 622.

† From the Acts of the Fourteenth General Council (Second of Lyons), A.D. 1274. Labbe, vol. xiv, p. 512.

‡ From the Acts of the Seventeenth General Council (that of Florence), A.D. 1438; Labbe, vol. xviii, p. 526.

§ John xxi, 15-17.

be preserved genuine and pure where it had been received. Therefore the bishops of the whole world, now singly, now assembled in synod, following the long established custom of Churches* and the form of the ancient rule,† sent word to this Apostolic See of those dangers especially which sprang up in matters of faith, that there the losses of faith might be most effectually repaired where the faith cannot fail.‡ And the Roman Pontiffs, according to the exigencies of times and circumstances, sometimes assembling Œcumenical Councils, or asking for the mind of the Church scattered throughout the world, sometimes by particular synods, sometimes using other helps which divine Providence supplied, defined as to be held those things which with the help of God they had recognized as conformable with the sacred Scriptures and apostolic traditions. For the Holy Spirit was not promised to the successors of Peter, that by His revelation they might make known new doctrine, but that by His assistance they might inviolably keep and faithfully expound the revelation or deposit of faith delivered through the Apostles. And indeed all the venerable Fathers have embraced and the holy orthodox Doctors have venerated and followed their apostolic doctrine; knowing most fully that this See of

* From a letter of St Cyril of Alexandria to Pope St Celestine I, A.D. 422, vol. VI, Paris edition of 1638.

† From a Rescript of St Innocent I to the Council of Milevis, A.D. 402. Labbe, vol. III, p. 47.

‡ From a letter of St Bernard to Pope Innocent II, A.D. 1130; Epist. 191, vol. IV, p. 433, Paris edition of 1742.

Saint Peter remains ever free from all blemish of error, according to the divine promise of the LORD our SAVIOUR made to the Prince of His disciples: "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted, confirm thy brethren."*

This gift, then, of truth and never-failing faith was conferred by heaven upon Peter and his successors in this Chair, that they might perform their high office for the salvation of all; that the whole flock of CHRIST, kept away by them from the poisonous food of error, might be nourished with the pasture of heavenly doctrine; that, the occasion of schism being removed, the whole Church might be kept one, and resting in its foundation, might stand firm against the gates of hell.

But since in this very age, in which the salutary efficacy of the Apostolic office is most of all required, not a few are found who take away from its authority, We judge it altogether necessary solemnly to assert the prerogative which the Only-begotten Son of God vouchsafed to join with the supreme pastoral office.

Therefore, faithfully adhering to the tradition received from the beginning of the Christian faith, for the glory of God our SAVIOUR, the exaltation of the Catholic religion, and the salvation of Christian people, with the approval of the Sacred Council, We teach and define that it is a dogma divinely revealed: that the Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when in discharge of the office of Pastor and

* Luke xxii, 32. See also the Acts of the Sixth General Council, A.D. 680; Labbe, vol. VII, p. 659.

Teacher of all Christians, by virtue of his supreme Apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine regarding faith or morals to be held by the universal Church, is, by the divine assistance promised to him in Blessed Peter, possessed of that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed that His Church should be endowed in defining doctrine regarding faith or morals; and that, therefore, such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church, irreformable.*

But if anyone—which may God avert!—presume to contradict this our definition, let him be anathema.

Given at Rome in public session, solemnly held in the Vatican Basilica in the year of our LORD one thousand eight hundred and seventy, on the eighteenth day of July, in the twenty-fifth year of our Pontificate.

In conformity with the original.

JOSEPH, BISHOP OF ST POLTEN,

Secretary to the Vatican Council.

* In the words used by Pope Nicholas I, note 13, and in the Synod of Quedlinburg, A.D. 1085, "It is allowed to none to revise its judgement, and to sit in judgement upon what it has judged." —Labbe, vol. XII, p. 679.

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